

Report

Independence National Historical Park

■ 1.0 Site Description

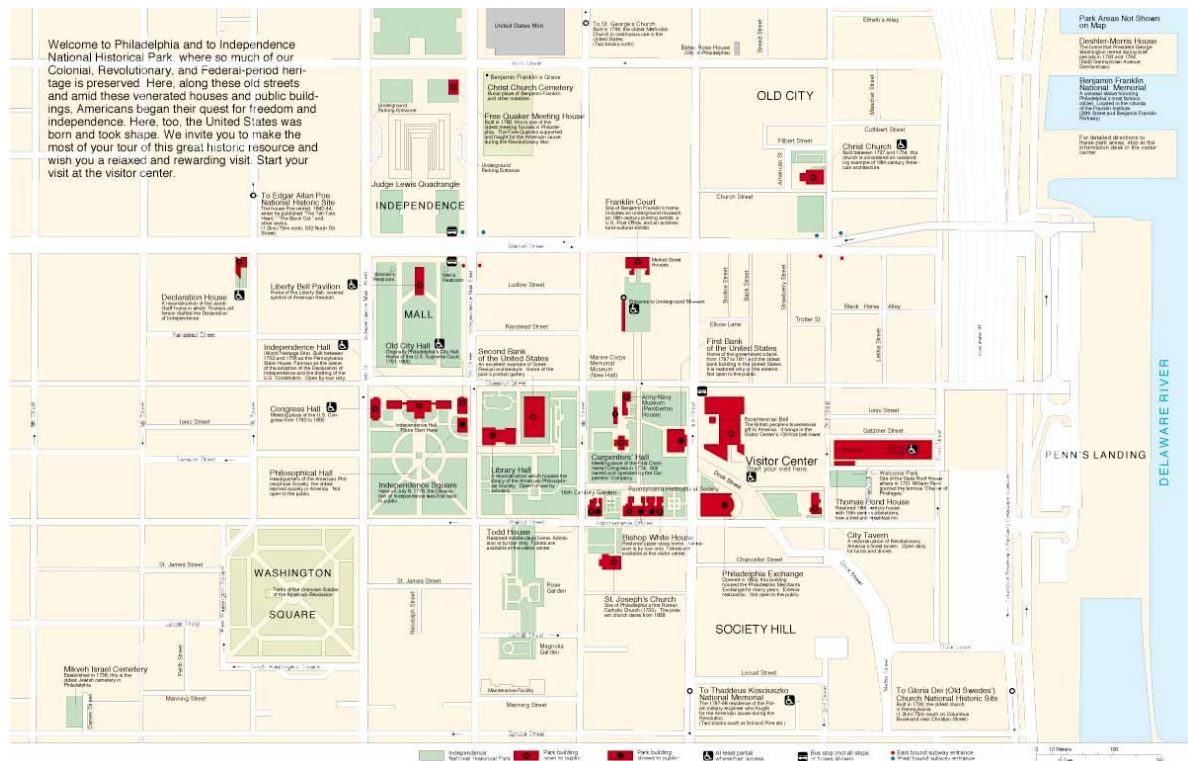
Independence National Historical Park (NHP), located in downtown Philadelphia, is considered by many to be the birthplace of the nation. The park encompasses approximately 45 acres and has approximately 20 buildings open to the public. At the park, visitors can view the Liberty Bell, an international symbol of the United States, and Independence Hall, where both the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution were created (See Figure 1). The park also interprets events and the lives of the American populace during the years when Philadelphia was the capital of the United States, from 1790 to 1800. A section of the park where Benjamin Franklin's home once stood is dedicated to the memory and teachings of Franklin.

Figure 1. Independence Hall



Most of the park's facilities are encompassed by a three-block mall. A map of the park and its various sites is shown in Figure 2. Visitors can initially access the park at the Visitor Center at 3rd and Chestnut Streets. The Visitor Center provides an orientation film, interactive computer exhibits, and information to help plan the visit. However this facility is approximately two blocks from the mall and, as a result, most visitors do not initially arrive at the Visitor Center before visiting the attractions along the mall. Major attractions in the park include Independence Hall, built between 1732 and 1756 as the Pennsylvania State House, later serving as the scene of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence and the drafting of the U.S. Constitution (see Figure 2); and the Liberty Bell Pavilion, home of the Liberty Bell, first given its name by 19th century abolitionists who sought to end slavery. Tours of Independence Hall are given every 15 minutes throughout the day. Limited tours are provided by prior reservation of the Todd House and Bishop White House. Tours at other sites are on a first-come, first-served basis.

Figure 2. Independence National Historical Park



The 1997 Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement presents a plan which would modify the current layout and facilities of the entire park with the objective of meeting "...the goals of the park and the community to enrich interpretive and educational opportunities, improve visitor orientation and services, and enhance heritage tourism. It will reinforce the park's identity and basic mission of preservation and interpretation by fostering synergy with the surrounding historic neighborhoods and cooperating institutions." These plans define a new sequence for visitor arrival and orientation and include a renovated underground parking garage, a new bus drop-off area, and a new Gateway Visitor Center. The new Visitor Center would provide visitor orientation, personal services, exhibits, and displays to enable visitors to develop personal itineraries for exploring the park's resources. Also included in the GMP are new educational and interpretive institutions: the Independence Park Institute and the National Constitution Center. In addition, the Liberty Bell Pavilion will be replaced with a new, larger building and outdoor open space would be renovated to include an outdoor café, special events space, and improved sight lines.

A number of the improvements proposed in the GMP are nearing completion or are underway. The expanded parking garage has been completed. The new Visitor Center and Liberty Bell Pavilion is scheduled to open in 2001. The National Constitution Center is scheduled to open in 2002.

■ 2.0 Existing ATS

The majority of visitors to Independence NHP travel to the park by private automobiles, tour bus, or school bus. Once they have entered the park area, visitors are then expected to walk between the park's various attractions. (A horse-drawn carriage is available for a \$15 fee but usage is limited.)

According to the Assistant Superintendent, 40 percent of the park's visitors arrive via tour or school buses. Because Independence NHP is located in downtown Philadelphia it is well served by a variety of public transit services, provided by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA). However visitor arrivals via SEPTA services are minimal. SEPTA buses currently operate on Market Street and Chestnut Street. The Route 76 bus makes a loop through the park to various other cultural attractions in the city. One bus route has a stop directly in front of Independence Hall at the corner of 5th and Chestnut Streets. However, the NPS has requested that SEPTA move this stop to another location near, but not immediately in front of, Independence Hall. SEPTA also provides rapid transit service via subway adjacent to the mall with a subway entrance at the corner of 5th and Market Streets. In addition, the City of Philadelphia operates its own tourist shuttle, known as the PhillyPhlash, which connects to hotels and tourist attractions throughout the city. The PhillyPhlash currently has a stop near Independence Hall. Privately operated rubber-tired trolleys also pass by the mall as part of a larger city-wide tour. A pick-up stop is located directly opposite the Liberty Bell Pavilion, although the NPS would like the stop relocated to improve the viewshed of the mall.

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

Because the park is located in the downtown area of Philadelphia and is already well-served by existing SEPTA public transportation services, there are no specific Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) needs at Independence NHP. To the contrary, the park officials have endeavored to minimize the extent to which buses might detract from the visitors' experience of the historic area. Private tour buses currently park along the Mall and the idling buses are considered an irritation due to their noise and exhaust emissions. The GMP identifies a plan to reduce the impact of visitor traffic in the park and historic district through a new system of handling vehicles closer to their point of arrival. The plan proposes that buses will drop off and pick up passengers at a sheltered bus area on the second block of the Mall before moving on to park at city-designated remote locations beyond the historic area. The goal of the bus area is that it generate activity rather than act as a barrier to pedestrian movement. The NPS will also request that the city relocate the designated standing area for commercially operated rubber-tired trolleys and commercially operated horse-drawn carriages away from the mall area. New standing areas will be located as close as possible to the new Gateway Visitor Center while not interfering with tourist-related traffic. The GMP also called for the closure of the 500 block of Chestnut Street to allow for uninterrupted pedestrian movement. However, the City of Philadelphia felt that an outright closure would be too disruptive, particularly for SEPTA

buses. As a result, the street was narrowed to two lanes, providing a safer crossing than the previous configuration.

The NPS has commissioned Orth-Rogers and Associates to conduct a study of bus operations in the Mall area with the objective of locating drop-off locations in the vicinity of the Mall and alternative remote parking areas. The City of Philadelphia is also studying options for alternative parking areas. The Volpe National Transportation Systems Center (VNTSC) is currently reviewing the Orth-Rogers report to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan and whether sufficient bus drop-off locations are identified. According to the Assistant Superintendent, the National Constitution Center will help fund a centralized bus drop-off site in the vicinity of their new headquarters.

■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

Based on the existing availability of public transportation services throughout the park area and downtown Philadelphia, there is no need for additional alternative transportation services at the Independence NHP. To the contrary, the primary concern relevant to ATS facing the NPS is how to minimize the intrusion of buses into the historic area while still providing the necessary level of accessibility to the park.

■ 5.0 Persons Interviewed

Dennis Reidenbach, Assistant Superintendent, Independence National Historical Park